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ICELANDIC-AMERICAN PERIODICALS

Emigration from Iceland to America began about 1870, and in the year 1873 the number of emigrants was considerable. One half of them settled in Wisconsin, the other half in Ontario. The next year the latter were joined by some new arrivals from Iceland, but the land they had taken there, the Muskoka Lake region, apparently did not please them, for they soon began to look for a new home. A few went to Nova Scotia and got possession of a hilly, unfertile country, which, however, as they realized after some years of toil, gave little promise for the future. The majority of the Ontario Icelanders hopefully turned their eyes westward, and a delegation was sent to Manitoba to investigate conditions. The delegates found in the Northwest Territory land which they considered acceptable, where they advised the formation of an Icelandic colony. About 250 Icelanders moved from Ontario to this region, arriving there towards the end of October, 1875, and remaining throughout the winter in a place called Gimli. The colony, which was named New Iceland, was situated on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg. Two agents were then sent by the Canadian government to Iceland to collect more settlers for the new colony, and it is estimated that in the years 1875 and 1876 some 1200 emigrants left Iceland for America. Several years later the Nova Scotia Icelanders also moved to Manitoba. Thus there were gradually formed small settlements of Icelanders in various parts of Canada and the United States. The one in Lyon County and Yellow Medicine County in Minnesota was probably the largest south of the Canadian border.

The New Iceland colony was at that time the principal centre for Icelanders in the western hemisphere, and it was therefore natural that the Icelandic-American periodical literature should there have its beginnings.¹ Fond of books and reading as the Icelanders have always been, they had brought their books with them from home.

¹ In this connection should be mentioned a paper antedating any of the Icelandic periodicals printed in America, which was exclusively devoted to information about Canada and the United States, and in which appeared many letters from Icelanders who had settled there. This was the paper *Amerika*; it appeared irregularly from December, 1873, to July, 1874, at Akureyri, Iceland, and was edited by Páll Magnússon, an agent for immigration from Iceland to America.

In spite of the primitive conditions under which they lived in the beginning, every household owned a small collection of volumes—a fact noted by Lord Dufferin, who at that time was governor general of Canada. He visited the colony in September, 1877, and having himself traveled in Iceland, he took great interest in these immigrants. In every house he entered he found a small library of some twenty or thirty books. It is easy to see that they could not long remain without a newspaper of their own. And on September 10, 1877, the first number of a four-page weekly appeared in Lund on the Icelandic River, Keewatin, Manitoba. It was called *Framfari*. The founder was Sigtryggur Jónasson, who had been most active in selecting the land and forming the colony. On the board of editors with him were Friðjón Friðriksson and Jóhann Briem. The publishers were The Printing Company of New Iceland.

In the leading article of the first number the editors say: "As soon as the Icelanders took to settling in considerable numbers in this hemisphere, they began to fear that they would lose here their language and their nationality unless they took some steps to preserve these. They have always agreed on two things as necessary to preserve this precious heritage of theirs. One was that the Icelanders should form a colony by themselves, the other that there should be published here in America a periodical in the Icelandic language. These things are so closely connected that it is not conceivable for the one to thrive without the other. Much has been said about the founding of Icelandic colonies, and experiments have been made in that direction in various parts of this country, but nothing of any consequence was done until this colony was established. On the other hand, no attempt has been made to publish a paper, although the Society of Icelanders in America, which was formed at the millennial celebration of the colonization of Iceland held at Milwaukee in 1874, had that as one of the principal things on their program." *Framfari* did not appear regularly every week; the first year 36 numbers were printed, the second year, 39. The last number is dated April 10, 1880. The discontinuance of the paper was due to lack of support; the number of subscribers never exceeded 600, and of these only 300 were in America.² All except the first eight numbers were edited by Halldór Briem, a graduate of the Theological Seminary in Reykjavík; he had first come to America as an interpreter with

² Cf. *Leifur*, I. árg. No. 1.

the emigrants, and afterwards returned to edit the paper and become minister of the gospel. He acquitted himself of the editorship with credit. The paper, of course, contained chiefly news—from Iceland, from Icelanders in America, and from the rest of the world to a limited extent. But in addition many editorials and articles appeared there dealing with various questions of importance to the settlers. Among them was the religious question, and the editor supported those who took issue with the Norwegian Synod. A few poems and a couple of short stories were printed there. One of the poems (An Emigrant's Farewell to Iceland, I. No. 19) is worthy of notice, not because of its literary value, but on account of the author's bitter attitude towards Iceland. In *Framfari* appeared the first poems of Kristinn Stefánsson, who holds a prominent place in the Icelandic-American literature. Some book reviews and a few literary articles were also included. On the whole, the paper was fairly well made up and carefully edited—which cannot be said of all of its successors.

In the meantime the number of Icelandic settlers in Winnipeg had been growing, and as they were in closer communication with the outside world than those who inhabited the somewhat inaccessible New Iceland, the next journalistic enterprise was entered upon by them. The second Icelandic newspaper in America was started in Winnipeg in the spring of 1883. It was called *Leifur*, after the first discoverer of the American continent, Leif the Lucky. Its proprietor and editor was Helgi Jónsson, who had been a prominent member of the Winnipeg colony since 1878. The first number is dated May 5, 1883. It was to appear weekly, as a small folio number of four pages. The paper and the printing of the first numbers were exceedingly bad, but they improved somewhat as time went on. The principal aim of the undertaking, as the editor expressed it in the first number, was, of course, to maintain the Icelandic nationality, to preserve the Icelandic tongue among the settlers, and to support Icelandic literature in America. Besides the current news, the paper contained a few original and translated poems and stories, some reprints from Icelandic periodicals, also articles on the various questions of the day, among which temperance as to drinking is discussed at considerable length. Neither *Leifur* nor *Framfari* took any special part in politics. But in *Leifur* unconcealed criticism of Icelandic conditions was often given and the first number of the second year opened with an appeal to

the Icelanders at home to leave their barren island and join their countrymen in America. Needless to say, such an attitude was resented in Iceland. The last number of *Leifur* appeared June 4, 1886, the paper thus having survived for three years.

These two papers were modeled after papers the emigrants had known in their native land. But with the appearance of the *Heimskringla*, September 9, 1886, we have a paper of much larger size, modeled after American papers. The founders and first editors of it were: Frímánn B. Anderson, a former contributor to *Leifur*, Einar Hjörleifsson, a writer of note, who had recently arrived in America, and Eggert Jóhannsson, who had been associate editor of *Leifur*. They announced that *Heimskringla* would be the largest newspaper published in the Icelandic language, and that it would be particularly devoted to all subjects of importance to Icelandic-Americans, and would also deal at some length with conditions and affairs in the mother country; stories and poems and other entertaining and instructive articles, both original and translated, would to a considerable extent fill its columns. The editors explicitly state that the paper was in no way to act as an agent for emigration from Iceland; that subject was to be treated according to the convictions of the writer, he was not to follow any inspiration from without. The paper, indeed, represented a step forward in Icelandic journalism, and it was easy to see of how great benefit such a paper, if well managed, might be to newly-arrived Icelanders, who must have been ignorant of nearly everything here, and a large number of whom doubtless were unable to read or understand English. The section of the paper devoted to news was quite extensive; the articles on domestic affairs of various kinds were generally instructive and clearly written; more space, too, could now be devoted to matters of special interest to the Icelanders themselves, such as their organization, societies, language, and the like. Anderson was a writer of some ability, a self-made man, apparently of wide reading. But the paper soon had to face difficulties, and in December, 1886, had to suspend publication. In April, 1887, it reappeared, and since that time it has been published regularly as a weekly—for a long time one of four pages, but in later years of eight. At the end of the year 1887 Anderson had become the sole owner and editor of it, but he lost his best collaborator, Einar Hjörleifsson left the paper because of some difference of opinion and, together

with other Icelanders, among whom was Sigtryggur Jónasson, started at the beginning of 1888 a weekly called *Lögberg*, the first number of which appeared January 14, 1888. These men had bought the presses of *Framfari* and *Leifur*, so that in a way the new enterprise was a continuation or transformation of the New Iceland Printing Company. In the first number the editors repudiate the accusation that they wish to ruin the already existing weekly, saying that they merely want to invite a healthy competition. If it comes to a struggle of life and death, the best will survive; but they think there is a place for more than one paper. The program of *Lögberg* was naturally much the same as that of *Heimskringla*. It commenced as a weekly of four pages in large folio, but with the beginning of the third year each number had eight pages and it has so continued down to the present, except that for a short period it appeared in two numbers weekly, each of four pages. Einar Hjörleifsson remained editor until 1895, when he returned to Iceland. For a short while (1890-91) Jón Ólafsson, Iceland's leading journalist, was associated with him, but a disagreement led to the latter's leaving the paper and founding one of his own. This was *Öldin*, "an Icelandic weekly record of current events and contemporary thought," a small four-page paper which was published from October, 1890, to February, 1892, twenty-one numbers appearing in all.

To meet the competition with *Lögberg*, the owners of *Heimskringla* had called from Iceland Gestur Pálsson, novelist, poet, and journalist, to assume the editorship. He became editor in January, 1891, but his management of the paper was brief, as he died in August of the same year. In March, 1892, Jón Ólafsson became editor, his paper *Öldin* being united with *Heimskringla* under the title *Heimskringla og Öldin*; this lasted for a year or so, during which period it was published twice a week. Jón Ólafsson edited the paper until March, 1894. In 1898 Baldwin L. Baldwinson³ became editor, remaining so until 1913. The paper, with a short interruption, has since been edited first by Rögnvaldur Pétursson, and after him by Magnús J. Skaptason.

³ Mr. Baldwinson acted for several years as immigration agent for the Canadian government in Iceland, and from June, 1891, to April, 1894, edited a paper in Reykjavík, called *Landneminn*, devoted to "news from Canada and the Icelanders there."

When Einar Hjörleifsson left *Lögberg* the editorship passed to Sigtryggur Jónasson who retained it until 1901. Magnús Paulson succeeded him, being editor from 1901 to 1905. Stefán Björnsson, a graduate of the Theological Seminary in Reykjavík, edited it from 1905 to 1914, and since that time, with a brief intermission, Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson, poet and physician, has been the editor.

These two papers, *Heimskringla* and *Lögberg*, were for a number of years the largest newspapers printed in Icelandic; but in size they have now been surpassed by the daily papers which in the last years have been published in Iceland. The main part of the Icelandic settlers in America have doubtless been dependent upon them for an account of current events, and also for guidance in political and other public affairs. They have each supported one of the rival political parties, and each in turn been supported by one *Lögberg* having been affiliated with the liberal party, and *Heimskringla* with the conservative. In other matters also they have been opposed to one another. *Lögberg* has leaned towards conservatism in all religious questions, and usually been in agreement with the Icelandic Lutheran Synod, while *Heimskringla* has been more liberal, and has opened its columns to religious discussion of all kinds. On the temperance question they seem to have agreed. But *Lögberg* has always maintained a higher literary standard than its competitor, having, on the whole, had the support of the more educated of the Icelanders. In the beginning it also enjoyed the advantage of having as its editor for a number of years a man of real literary distinction. The tradition Einar Hjörleifsson had established, his successors tried to live up to, but not always with success. His contributions to the paper were always well written, whether they were political editorials, reviews, stories, translations from foreign languages, or thrusts at his enemies. Many of the early *feuilletons* were translated by him, and he selected for that purpose works of a higher class than has been customary since. The *feuilletons* of both papers have usually consisted of long novels, later issued in book form under the general titles of *Bókasafn Lögbergs* and *Sögusafn Heimskringlu*. Recently they have been novels of an inferior sort, and the translations have frequently been bad. The printing of the papers has usually been tolerably good, but their columns have at times been disfigured by too violent personal quarrels between the editors and others, and it seems as if

that indecorous custom were still being kept up at the present time.

In April, 1893, the Heimskringla Printing and Publishing Company began to publish as a separate magazine, with Jón Ólafsson as the editor, the monthly *Öldin*, each number of 16 pages in octavo. The contents consisted chiefly of stories and poems, original and translated, entertaining and instructive articles on various topics, especially in natural science. Brief editorial notices were contributed to each number by the editor. Many poems by Stephan G. Stephanson, the leading Icelandic-American poet, appeared in its pages. Chapters of Matthías Jochumsson's translation of Topelius' *Feltskürns berättelser* were published here for the first time. The last two volumes of the magazine were edited by Eggert Jóhannsson, who was then the editor of *Heimskringla*, but Jón Ólafsson continued to contribute to it. The December number of 1896 was the last to appear, the third volume then having been completed.

Lögberg printed for its subscribers an *Almanak* for the years 1888 and 1889, which contained nothing but the calendar. Six years later Ólafur S. Thorgeirsson, the Icelandic publisher of Winnipeg, began to publish a calendar in Icelandic. His first *Almanak* for 1895 was a very small pamphlet, which, besides the calendar, contained some useful information about every-day affairs; but as time went on, this publication gradually grew in size. Every year new features were added, and finally essays and stories of some length were included. This *Almanak*, which has now been in existence for twenty-one years, has come to be one of the most important Icelandic publications in the western hemisphere. It records year by year all events of importance among the Icelanders here, and in it is to be found the most complete history of the Icelanders in America yet printed. The editor has secured from reliable persons in the various Icelandic settlements throughout Canada and the United States an historical account of each of these settlements, with biographical sketches, and often with portraits of the settlers. These articles, when completed will form a new Icelandic "Land-námabók" which will be a most useful work for future historians and genealogists. Another almanac for the years 1898-99, under the title *Stjarnan*, was also printed in Winnipeg, edited by Stefán B. Jónsson. The reading matter in the two volumes which appeared consisted of information regarding practical affairs,

principally agricultural subjects. The third Icelandic *Almanak* (*The Maple Leaf Almanac*), published and edited by Sigfús B. Benedictsson, for the years 1900-05, was first printed in Selkirk, Manitoba, and later in Winnipeg. The last two volumes contain one or two articles on Icelandic American literature, but otherwise the contents are chiefly poetical productions, the editor himself being the principal contributor.

An Icelandic Socialist organ saw the light in Winnipeg at the opening of the twentieth century. This was *Dagskrá II*,⁴ edited by Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson, the present editor of *Lögberg*. It had very small beginnings, the first seven numbers being in small octavo of four pages, but it afterwards assumed a larger size. It was to be a weekly, but it never attained to that distinction, only 50 numbers being published during the year and a half of its existence (July, 1901 — February, 1903). Needless to say, it was independent in politics, and endorsed the most radical ideas in all fields, from religion to the sale of liquor.

The strongest bond of union between Icelanders in America has been the church organization. The Icelandic Evangelical-Lutheran Synod was established in 1885, and a monthly magazine to be published by the Synod was decided upon at the same time. This, under the title of *Sameiningin*, began in March, 1886, and has appeared regularly down to date. The first editor was Rev. Jón Bjarnason, the organizer and first president of the Synod, and the foremost leader among his countrymen in America; he edited it to the day of his death, June 3, 1914. Since then it has been edited by Rev. Björn B. Jónsson, the present president of the Synod. It has naturally dealt almost exclusively with church affairs and religious questions, and other subjects have been treated only in so far as they touched upon the church or religion. It has always stood for rigorous orthodoxy and been impervious to all modernism; of late it has fought hard against biblical criticism and the new theology. But it has been well edited, and therefore always commanded the attention even of those who were not in sympathy with its program. Many contributions from Iceland, especially hymns and religious poems, have appeared in its pages, although the relations between the Icelandic Church on this side of the Atlantic and the Church in Iceland have frequently been strained.

⁴The editor, before he left Iceland, had edited a paper called *Dagskrá*, hence this title of monarchical appearance.

In 1891 the Synod decided to issue another periodical publication, the annual *Aldamót*. This was edited by Rev. Friðrik J. Bergmann, probably the most influential man within the Synod next to the president himself. It contained mostly longer poems, essays, and papers on religious and ethical subjects, the ministers of the Synod being the principal contributors. Noteworthy in every volume are also the reviews of recent Icelandic books; they were written by the editor himself and are of some length and often of a good quality. Thirteen volumes appeared of this annual (to 1903). Two years later another annual of similar kind was published by the Synod, called *Áramót*. It ran for five years (1905-09) being edited by Rev. Björn B. Jónsson. It gave a report of the annual conferences of the Synod, and contained the papers and sermons delivered on these occasions.

Besides the periodicals already mentioned the Synod has published three papers for Sunday school teachers and children. The first of these, *Kennarinn*, appeared under the editorship of different ministers of the Synod from 1897 to 1905. This monthly was, however, first published by two Icelanders in succession, in Minneota, Minn., and there the first five volumes were printed; but in 1902 the Synod took charge of it, and thereafter it was printed in Winnipeg. The second paper, the monthly *Börninn*, was edited by Rev. N. Steingr. Thorláksson, 1905-08; and the third, the fortnightly *Framtíðin*, was also edited by him, 1908-10.

Between the two most prominent members of the Synod, Jón Bjarnason and F. J. Bergmann, there developed in course of time differences of opinion on various religious questions, which ultimately led to the latter's resignation from the Synod. The discontinuance of the *Aldamót* was in part probably due to this growing disagreement. Three years later (1906), Bergmann became the editor of the monthly magazine *Breiðablik*, which was founded in Winnipeg by Ólafur S. Thorgeirsson, the publisher. This may be classed as one of the best periodicals that have appeared in America in the Icelandic language. It was attractively made up, well printed, and carefully edited, and it occasionally had illustrations, chiefly portraits. The contents were of a general character, religious, social, and literary questions being the principal topics dealt with, and it extended its field to conditions in Iceland as well as in America. In religious matters it took a liberal position, thus coming into conflict with the Synod and its adher-

ents. The editor's religious opinions were apt to color his treatment of all other subjects, there is a religious undercurrent throughout. The Bredablik Publishing Company continued the publication of the magazine for some years, but in 1914 it ceased to appear for lack of support. Eight volumes were published (1906-14).

The Icelanders in America have, broadly speaking, followed two paths in their religion: they have either remained within the Lutheran Church, in which they had been brought up, or they have become Unitarians. The first Icelandic Unitarian organ was the monthly *Dagsbrún*, which, under the editorship of Magnús J. Skaptason, a former Lutheran minister from Iceland, began to appear at Gimli, Manitoba, in 1893; from April, 1895, to the end of the year 1896 it was published by the Unitarian Congregation in Winnipeg. Four volumes were issued. Two years later Mr. Skaptason started another Unitarian monthly called *Lísing*, but only four numbers were printed (November, 1898—February, 1899). The next enterprise was of even shorter duration; the *Ný Dagsbrún*, edited in Gimli by Jóhann P. Sólmundarson in 1904 was discontinued after one good-sized number had appeared. More successful was *Heimir*, a monthly first published by "some Icelanders in America" and afterwards by the Icelandic Unitarian Association in America. It existed for about ten years (9 volumes 1904-14), being edited by Rögnvaldur Pétursson and Guðmundur Árnason. On the whole it was a fairly well edited magazine although printing and paper might have been better. It offered its readers a variety of subjects, by no means confining itself directly to the propaganda of Unitarianism, although one has the feeling that in the selection of reading matter the religious view is rarely neglected—which after all is common to magazines of that kind. Nevertheless it was a readable and in many ways an attractive publication, but it seems as if the Icelandic Unitarians are not sufficiently strong or well organized to manage the burden of even so small a magazine.

During recent years a few periodicals of an ephemeral existence have been published in Winnipeg. One of these *Tuttugasta Öldin*, edited by Sigfús B. Benedictsson, was a paper of tendencies so "advanced" as to find in the Christian chronology a thing of the past and therefore deliberately adopted a new one; but only sixteen numbers saw the light (1909-10). In 1911 two magazines

were started in Winnipeg, one *Syrpa* being published by Ólafur S. Thorgeirsson, the other *Fróði* edited by Magnús J. Skaptason. Both contained principally translations from other languages, stories, and other entertaining matter; the former was issued until the end of the year 1915, while the latter after having been transferred to Gimli, ceased to appear in 1914—the last number being published in August of that year. A small monthly paper, *Alþýðuvínurinn*, chiefly devoted to advocating temperance, was published by Stefán Einarsson and Egill Erlendsson from January to August 1914.

In Gimli, Manitoba, there have from time to time appeared various periodical publications, a few of them already mentioned above. The one among the Gimli publications that continued longest was the monthly *Svava*, published and edited by Gísli M. Thompson, 1895-1904 (6 volumes). This was devoted to literature and entertaining and instructive articles of the popular kind; several original poems and stories are to be found there; but the contents consisted mainly of translations. Another enterprise of Thompson's was the fortnightly *Bergmálið*, a newspaper which was published from December, 1897, to February, 1901. It was succeeded by the weekly *Baldur*, originally published by "some New-Icelanders," and later by the Gimli Printing and Publishing Company. Appearing from January, 1903, to February, 1910 (7 volumes) in large folio, it was a paper of radical tendencies, and the editing of it left much to be desired. Of a similar kind was the weekly *Gímlungur*, "a paper for farmers and laborers," published by the Maple Leaf Printing and Supply Company and edited by Gísli P. Magnússon, from March, 1910, to October, 1911, a typical village newspaper. In connection with it was issued the monthly *Heimilisvínurinn*, of which only six numbers were printed (May-October, 1910), containing mostly translated stories.

Selkirk, Manitoba, has contributed also to the periodical literature. *The Maple Leaf Almanac* has been mentioned above. In 1898, Mrs. Margrét J. Benedictsson founded there a monthly magazine devoted to woman's suffrage and the emancipation of women, with the title *Freyja*. The editor asserts that it was the first paper of its kind to be published in Canada. The subject-matter consisted to a great extent of translations, stories, and other articles dealing with the cause; it also advocated tem-

perance. From 1902 to 1910 it was printed in Winnipeg. The last number bears the date of July, 1910. Mrs. Benedictsson's husband, Sigfús B. Benedictsson, was the editor of *Selkirkingur*, a small paper which was printed at Selkirk from September, 1900, to March, 1902, 26 numbers being published.

The first, and so far the only, newspaper to appear in Icelandic in the United States was the monthly *Vinland*, which, in small folio numbers of eight pages, was published in Minneota, Minn., from March, 1902, to February, 1908. It was founded by G. B. Björnsson, but was afterwards published by the *Vinland* Publishing Company, the editors being Rev. Björn B. Jónsson and Dr. Th. Thordarson, the latter a graduate of the College of Iceland. This paper, primarily intended for the Icelanders living in the United States, dealt above all with affairs in this country. The news from home and abroad was given in a concise form on the front page, the rest of the paper being devoted to longer articles on various topics. Reviews of Icelandic books were often to be found in its columns. On the whole, this is the most attractive of the Icelandic periodicals of the western hemisphere, well edited, well written, and neatly got up, and occasionally illustrated with portraits of Icelanders. It was discontinued, apparently, not for lack of subscribers, but because no editor could be found to take charge of it.—The monthly *Kennarinn*, which for some time was printed in Minneota, has been mentioned above.

The periodicals published in the Icelandic language in America have thus been some thirty in number; only a few of them have, however, been of any permanence, and at the present time but four of these are still active, the oldest being in its thirty-first year. It is not likely that the number of periodicals will be greatly augmented in the future; they have hitherto depended upon the early immigrants and upon the continuous immigration from Iceland, but this has now virtually ceased. Very few contributions to the press or to Icelandic-American literature have come from men of Icelandic parentage born in America. It has been said that of immigrants the Icelanders were found to be far the readiest to mingle with the native population.⁵ And this recalls the controversies which took place in the eighties and nineties between the Icelanders who had emigrated and those at home. The Icelandic-American press has often criticised severely conditions in Ice-

⁵ Cf. Rupert Brooke, *Letters from America*. New York, 1916. p. 113.

land, painted her future in dark colors, and at times even went so far as to doubt that the mother-country had any future possibilities. All this was naturally emphasized by agents sent to Iceland by the Canadian government to persuade people to emigrate to the promised land. The Icelandic press, as was to be expected, resented such arguments and in turn sometimes gave misleading accounts of America; but they duly pointed out that the immigrants and their descendants would soon be absorbed by the native population of the country they settled in, and that the Icelandic nationality and Icelandic language would disappear there. No one would be inclined to-day to deny the truth of their predictions. This quarrel between the two groups of Icelanders is ended. At present they are on the best of terms, and Icelandic-Americans have frequently, both in words and deeds, shown their affection for the mother-country, and taken active interest in its affairs. Easier means of communication and mutual visits have cleared the air on both sides, and from the interchange of ideas both have benefited.

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